

First record of Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* for St. Helena, South Atlantic

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Première mention du Canard à bosse *Sarkidiornis melanotos* pour l'île de Sainte-Hélène, Atlantique Sud. Le 4 janvier 2013, un Canard à bosse *Sarkidiornis melanotos* a été photographié à Bottom Woods, Sainte-Hélène. L'oiseau est resté près des bassins de décantation où, le 21 janvier, il a été rejoint par un deuxième individu. Les deux oiseaux ont ensuite été observés régulièrement sur le même site pendant environ cinq semaines ; ils n'ont plus été vus après février 2013. Il s'agit de la première donnée confirmée d'un Anatidé sauvage pour l'île. Le Canard à bosse habite l'Afrique, l'Asie et l'Amérique du Sud. Bien qu'il soit considéré comme principalement sédentaire, des données de baguage en Afrique indiquent que certains oiseaux peuvent effectuer des déplacements de >3.500 km. Les canards observés à Sainte-Hélène sont probablement arrivés à l'île grâce au vents soufflant du sud-est.

St. Helena lies well west of the inter-hemisphere migration routes that follow the continental shelf and coastline, but is sufficiently close to them to account for accidental visitors blown off course, of which some are perhaps ship-assisted (Rowlands *et al.* 1998). These are predominately shorebirds, with the occasional exception (Rowlands *et al.* 1998, Beard 2012, 2015, Hillman & Clingham 2012). Here we report the first Knob-billed (Comb) Ducks *Sarkidiornis melanotos* for the island, which also constitute the first confirmed record of wild Anatidae on St. Helena.

On 4 January 2013 we were informed as to the presence of an unusual duck near the settlement ponds at Bottom Woods (15°56'816"S 05°40'432"W) and thereafter we were able to take several photographs (Figs. 1–2). The black speckles on the white head and neck, the pure white breast and centre of belly, and the absence of a knob on the bill identify the bird as an adult female Knob-billed Duck (Madge & Burn 1988). B. Rowlands confirmed that the species had not previously been recorded on St. Helena.

The bird remained around the settlement ponds where it was joined by a second individual on 21 January. This bird had less speckling on the head and neck, while its white parts were washed pale brownish buff (Fig. 3), suggesting it was an immature (Madge & Burn 1988). The two Knob-billed Ducks were subsequently observed regularly at the same location for *c.*5 weeks, but were not seen after February 2013.

There are no indigenous or regularly occurring wild ducks, nor any wildfowl collections on the island, but there are a number of historical

references, the most recent dating from 1894, when Governor W. Grey Wilson noted 'five wild ducks' that were present for seven or eight days, although they were not identified to species (Rowlands *et al.* 1998). *S. melanotos* occurs in Africa, Asia and South America. The South American population has recently been split as *S. sylvicola* (American Comb Duck) mainly on the basis of the adult male's plumage (del Hoyo & Collar 2014). It is considered primarily sedentary, with poorly understood seasonal movements, mostly dictated by water availability (BirdLife International 2013). However, in Africa *c.*10% of the population are trans-equatorial migrants and ringing recoveries indicate that some undertake extensive journeys, occasionally surpassing 3,500 km (Hockey *et al.* 2005, Carboneras & Kirwan 2014). Although it appears unlikely that the birds on St. Helena were ship-assisted, their arrival coincided with that of several yachts participating in the Governor's Cup, a race between Simon's Town, South Africa, and Jamestown, St. Helena, with several of the participating yachts following the African coast north to Namibia before crossing the South Atlantic Ocean. Adult female African Comb Ducks have pale grey flanks, while those of South American birds are stated to be dark grey (Madge & Burn 1988). This would point to the St. Helena birds being African, but it may be difficult or impossible to determine this on the basis of the available photographs. The origin of the birds thus cannot be traced with certainty, although they probably reached St. Helena on the south-east trade winds.



Figures 1–3. Knob-billed Duck / Canard à bosse *Sarkidiornis melanotos*, Bottom Woods, St. Helena, 4 January (Robert Kleinjan), 9 January (Nick Stevens) and 22 January 2013 (Robert Kleinjan)

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